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## 'Top Secret' Stamp Busy at FEMA

**"T**he cheaper the crook, the gaudier the patter," an amused Sam Spade observed of Wilmer, the tough-talking gunman in "The Maltese Falcon." In Washington bureaucratic circles, this fact of life translates: The less an agency has to hide, the more it is obsessed with "security."

Surely the glorified air-raid wardens of the Federal Emergency Management Agency are the most paranoid bureaucrats in the government. Desperate to make their little agency appear to be a vital cog in national defense, they stamp security classifications on just about every document but the cafeteria menu.

The latest figures from the Information Security Oversight Office, which keeps track of the way federal agencies handle classification, shows the true absurdity of FEMA's infatuation with its rubber stamp.

According to the oversight office's statistics, FEMA stamped a whopping 30 percent of its classified documents "top secret." By contrast, the Defense Department, which handles far more sensitive information than the civil-defense agency, stamped only 1 percent of its classified material "top secret."

And the Central Intelligence Agency, which has information so secret that even its classification is secret, puts the "top secret" stamp on only 5 percent of its restricted material.

Rep. Glenn English (D-Okla.), chairman of a House subcommittee on government information, has asked the Information Security Oversight Office to investigate "this apparent disproportionate

use of 'top secret' at FEMA." In a letter to the office's director, seen by our associate Donald Goldberg, English suggests, "It may be that the phenomenon of 'prestige classification' . . . is a fact of life at FEMA."

**Gray Market Blues:** Former White House adviser Michael K. Deaver isn't the only American who found a bargain in a German car this year. Through the end of April, about 20,000 German cars—mostly the fancier BMW and Mercedes models—have been imported through the "gray market" that saves a purchaser as much as 45 percent of the cost in this country.

American Mercedes dealers have been particularly hard hit by the gray market; some 22,000 Americans bought Mercedes in Europe last year, taking advantage of the overvalued dollar.

The savings can be substantial: A Mercedes diesel sedan that costs about \$32,000 at a U.S. dealership sells for about \$15,000 in Europe. (A similar model sold for \$5,600 here in 1970.)

American dealers are understandably upset about the flourishing gray market, and bills have been introduced in Congress to put a crimp in it. The dealers' main argument is that cars bought in Europe don't meet the safety standards required for cars the dealers import.

But there is little or no hard evidence to support this claim, since the Transportation Department insists that all imports meet its safety and pollution standards. The necessary modifications can cost the individual buyer-importer a few thousand dollars, but on a \$50,000 automobile the net savings will still be significant.